The Benefits of Using OERs, from Douglas College Faculty

Nathan Hall

My name is Nathan Hall, and I am in the Faculty of LLPA. I teach in three different departments: ELLA (English Language Learning and Acquisition), Student Success, and the TESL training program for teaching new ESL teachers. I am also the Educational Technology and Pedagogy Coordinator for LLPA. I've been at the college since January 2014.

What are OERs?

OER stands for Open Educational Resources. If you unpack it, it means a lot of different things to different people. Many think first of open textbooks—free textbooks that can be viewed online or obtained in cheap or free print versions. But OER is much more than that. It includes videos, interactive elements, syllabi, and other materials shared under Creative Commons licenses. The idea is to take what we have and share it with others so they can build on it, remix, and adapt it to their own situations.

Why use OERs?

The principle of OER fits me well because I value collaboration and consultation with others, including my students. I see myself as a curator of materials rather than an owner. OER allows me to adapt resources to my classes, combine chapters from multiple textbooks, and localize content. It also lets me include topics often avoided by traditional publishers, such as minority and underrepresented groups, so we can have open discussions in class.

Quality of OERs

Quality varies, just like traditional textbooks. Sometimes I find high-quality materials; other times, low-quality ones. But that's no different from commercial publishing. With OER, I can choose what's useful and ignore the rest. I often use multiple sources to cover strengths and weaknesses across materials.

Student Feedback

Students have not complained about OERs—in fact, they appreciate them. Using web-based versions means students can access materials on their phones anytime, anywhere, which is crucial given their busy schedules. They often thank me for using open textbooks because it saves them money and gives them flexibility.

How can faculty start using OERs?

Start by talking to the library—they have curated OER resources for each faculty and department. BCcampus also offers an excellent searchable database of OER textbooks and resources. Talk to colleagues who use OER and learn from their experiences.

Would you recommend OERs?

Absolutely. While not every subject has a perfect OER resource, you can still supplement with open materials and even create your own. I license all my resources under Creative Commons so others can use them.

Jennifer Barker

I teach biology, mostly first-year courses. I've been at Douglas for about seven years.

Why use OERs?

Biology textbooks are expensive and often huge, so many students don't buy them. I prefer to provide minimalist resources that all students can access rather than have them rely on borrowing or memorizing Wikipedia pages. OER helps me give students consistent, meaningful content without financial barriers.

Quality of OERs

Our adapted resources are usable, though not as polished as commercial textbooks. We're not professional editors or illustrators, but students care more about content than aesthetics. Over time, we're improving diagrams, layouts, and language consistency. For now, OERs are on par— or better—because they're tailored to our students.

Student Feedback

Students appreciate OERs and the pared-down content. The only issue is sometimes having too many options, which can overwhelm them. But overall, they value free access and flexibility.

Advice for Faculty

Just start. Many textbooks are already available. Use them, adapt them, and let students know what's happening. Students are forgiving and appreciate transparency.

Jamie Yard

I teach anthropology and have been at Douglas for eight years.

Why use OERs?

Introductory anthropology is often an elective, so it's hard to justify an $80–$200 textbook. When an OER became available from the American Anthropological Association, I adopted it to make resources accessible.

Quality of OERs

The OER I use is comparable to traditional textbooks. It was developed and edited by experts, which gives me confidence in its quality.

Student Feedback

No complaints—students appreciate the accessibility.

Advice for Faculty

Explore what's available. BCcampus and other sites have curated lists. It takes time to curate resources, but it's worth it.

David Wright

I teach English and have been at Douglas for 13 years.

Why use OERs?

English courses often use texts that are out of copyright, yet students were paying up to $100 for textbooks. OER saves students money and gives access to updated materials.

Quality of OERs

Often better than traditional textbooks because they're current and frequently updated. They can include test banks and examples relevant to today's cultural climate.

Student Feedback

No complaints. The only challenge is navigating online formats, but students can print sections or entire textbooks if they prefer.

Advice for Faculty

Start small. Use existing OERs, mix them with traditional materials if needed, and be clear with students about costs. There's no excuse for making students pay for outdated content when free, high-quality resources exist.